

Cadastral Maps Can Find Your Home

by Tom Hruska

Cadastral Maps are the best way to locate relative's homes if you're in the old country on a "Roots Trip." Their scale of 1:2880 means that one inch on the map is 240 feet. They are color coded as to occupation and tie fields to owners' names and their home numbers. Jan Parež' article in the December 1997 *Naše Rodina* explains their history so I will not repeat his work here.

An interesting aside concerning Empress Maria Theresa's house numbering system: The numbers started at some recognizable landmark such as a Church, City Hall or town Gate. They then ran down one side of the road to either the end of town or till the numbers had gotten too large. Then they started again with roman I after the first set and II and III after following sets. If the village was small, when the numbers got to the other side of town they continued across the street going back to the starting point. This left houses 5, 6, 7 & 8 next to each other but across from houses 96, 95, 94 & 93 - not like our

system of odd numbers on one side and even numbers on the other side of a street. Then to confuse us even more, as new houses were built between the old ones (usually by the children) those houses were given the next available number, so you have sequences of 15, 16, 34, 17 across from 89, 105, 88, 110, 87, etc.

In July, 1998, Tom Zahn, who helped Parež, arranged for me to visit the State Central Archives in Praha to get copies and photograph maps of my ancestor's areas. I was only the second person given permission to photograph (no flash or tripods) and be-

tween Tom and his P.A.T.H. Finders staff we got some magnificent material. In fact, a few days later I was using the map copies to find my parents' homes from the air while doing aerial photography. The cost of a black and white map copy is \$20.00 and a few days delay. The copies you get measure 11" x 17" on regular paper which can be folded or rolled for carrying. There are not many Xerox copiers in the Czech Republic - not in every food store as in the states - and I did not see another copier capable of duplicating the 11" x 17" size anywhere beside the Archives so be careful with the copy, I don't know what they would charge for a second copy of one they've already sold you.

After checking in at the Archive's entry we climbed the stone steps and reported to the main reference room. Tom had reserved as many maps as he could at one sitting and a few land records, which Eduard Kovalda translated for us. The reference room is shown in Fig. 1, typical of the warmth and charm of any gov-

ernment office building. We commandeered the rear table and as I pulled cameras and equipment from the pockets of my coat I felt like an old Hollywood caricature of a spy. By using the auto focus feature of a Minolta 7000 every shot was in focus and properly exposed. I started

by holding the camera above the maps but for close-ups Tom and Eduard held them vertically and moved them closer and further from the camera. We then had the film processed to plan any necessary reshooting the next week. There is a small photo shop just off Charles Square where Tom got twenty-some rolls processed overnight. Four were from the Archives.

Figure 2 shows a Cadastral map for my mother's hometown of Kaunice. The grid shows the portions of the village on each individual sheet of paper. You get the entire map in an envelope/package and handle it



Figure 1. Research room at the Praha State Central Archives.



Figure 5. Aunt Ruza talking with present owner of #41.

very carefully. I don't know how much they would allow an American tourist to handle the maps unsupervised since Tom and Eduard were known to the archives staff.

A word of warning! If you enter Europe through Great Britain, British airport X-Ray systems will damage (FRY!) your film. It damaged mine! After photographing the most impressive air show I've ever seen (Duxford) the innermost frame of most rolls had fog strips on it - indicating the damage was entering the cassette through the winding stem not the feed lips.

Next day - on to the airport! Tom had arranged to rent a Cessna from the Kolín airport. For the first time in fifty years I sat in the back so I could shoot past the wing strut. Renata Solanska took my aunt Ruza, Eduard and I over Kouřim and Kounice and, what do you know, the towns looked just like the maps. Figures 3 and 4 show my mother's birth home of #41 Kounice on the map and from the air. Figure 5 shows #41 from the ground when we later visited the present occupants. Start by comparing Figs 3 and 4 by finding the small lake at the center right - blue on the map and reflecting the clouds in the photo. Then go down and left from the lake and find #41 on the corner. Number 39 is no longer standing but the angled #28 is still there along with the other three. Notice that in Fig. 3 the pen is retracted and used as a pointer. You may not touch the maps!

Figures 6, 7 & 8 show how to tie in Land Records with Cadastral maps. Fig. 6 shows the map of Smidary (the present Czech spelling) where, at the bottom cen-

tre, you can see property #197. Fig. 7 shows the Land Record book and near the middle is the name "Hruschka Smedary", my grandfather's family in the Germanic spelling of the 1840's, at property #197, living in residence #187. Fig. 8 shows the retracted pen pointing to "Drobiny", my grandmother's family name, again the Germanic spelling of the Czech "Drobny" located at property #188, living in residence #16. It would be nice to think that they were a "boy-and-girl-next door" romance, but not quite. It's sort of a family joke that, "When Drobny (meaning "small") married

Hruska (meaning "pear") they produced small pears - my father was only 5'-3" tall and I'm under 5'-7" tall.

On another flight to my father's birth town of Nový Bydžov we used Cadastral maps from both the Praha Archives plus the Nový Bydžov museum to locate the street and drove to it later. This is the subject of another story called, "Grandpa Worked Here", about the tannery where my grandfather, Antonin, worked. Tom arranged for a tour through the tannery so I was able to climb the very stairways my grandfather climbed.

Then another upcoming story called "Half The Names Are Hruska" when P.A.T.H. Finders managed to trace my father's line back to the small village of Stankov where, literally, almost half the names on the fields are "Hruska", "Hruschka", or some variant. Since the maps we used were drawn in 1842 the German spellings make sense.

About the only time we didn't use Cadastral maps was when I visited a village named, Hruska. This is covered in another upcoming story, "Hruska Visits Hruska" with aerial photos galore.

P.A.T.H. Finders is continuing their research (just found a marriage in 1658) for my return in 1999, probably as you are reading this article now. This time I'll have a GPS (Global Positioning System, which is legal in Czech but not in Russia) to ground truth the latitude and longitude of all the buildings before flying - also to correct/extend my copy of Cadastral maps. I'll report when I return.